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24 July 1975

The Editors
Review of National Intelligence
Product Review Division
Intelligence Community Staff

Sirs:

As a more-or-less close observer of the agony of Indochina over the past 25 years, I feel compelled to offer an early comment on the "very preliminary look" at the Community's coverage during the final months in the June RONI. Over the years, the Community generally has done a credible job of analyzing the capabilities, strengths, weaknesses, and likely courses of action of the Communists in Indochina than of the non-Communists. This was true in the French war in the early 50's, as well as in the 60's and 70's. Most of the "shock" developments throughout these three decades have been related to the unanticipated failures or deficiencies of the non-Communists--political and military--in coping with foreseen levels of Communist capabilities and pressures.

- The only "real" surprise of the Diem Bien Phu campaign was the paralysis of the French command--and its loss of nerve--when confronted with the reality of the onslaught by Viet Minh forces whose strength and preparations had been assessed accurately and in detail by intelligence. The confident "let them come" challenge by the French on the eve of battle was replaced by shock and dismay when their artillery and air support proved ineffective in breaking up the expected Communist assaults.

- The late 50's and early 60's were marked by misplaced confidence in the anticipated performance of Vietnamese military and security forces against the well-defined and clearly growing Viet Cong threat.

- The real "shock" of the Tet offensive stemmed primarily from exaggerated perceptions of the cumulative effects of the application of U.S. military power over the preceding two-and-a-half years, rather than from a lack of indications of an impending major enemy offensive.

- In the final denouement, the surprise factor--as noted in RONI--was the collapse of ARVN (when the realization hit home at all levels that ARVN would no longer be supported in the manner to which it had become accustomed, i.e., the B-52's would never return), rather than the accurately assessed weight of enemy pressure.

- This record clearly highlights a long-standing source of frustration to intelligence analysts and their consumers--that of making net assessments in "real-world" situations when inputs on one

side of the equation are influenced by the subjective views and judgments of operating officials committed to the successful execution of policies, strategies and programs. Too often is the net judgment subverted or dominated by the overconfident and insistent views of operators and policy-makers concerning the "progress" achieved by friendly activities: The "success" of Operation Atlante and the expansion of the Vietnamese Army in 1953-54; the impact of U.S. training for ARVN in 1956-62; the effectiveness of U.S. search and destroy operations in 1965-67; the "success" of Vietnamization in 1973-75, inter alia.

• Although the intelligence appraisals were often less than perfect, they were generally more pessimistic--or realistic--than the judgments of the operating officials. But the impartial intelligence appraisals were often discounted or ignored, or in some cases simply watered down, by the more subjective, optimistic--and influential--views of the operators.

Clearly, one lesson to be learned from our Indochina experience is the need to evolve a mechanism for providing the policy maker with truly objective net assessments in situations where the U.S. is operationally committed--a mechanism that will effectively blend, if not balance, the voices of the Pollyannas with those of the Cassandras. The record of Indochina to the end shows that the influence of the Pollyannas was unduly prominent, to the detriment of the national interests of the U.S. and of the Vietnamese and American peoples.



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Approved For Release 2004/05/12 : CIA-RDP80M01133A001100030028-4

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Approved For Release 2004/05/12 : CIA-RDP80M01133A001100030028-4